**The Myth of Reverse Racism**

“The ‘reverse racism’ card is often pulled by white people when people of color call out racism and discrimination, or create spaces for themselves … that white people aren’t a part of. The impulse behind the reverse racism argument seems to be a desire to prove that people of color don’t have it that bad, they’re not the *only* ones that are put at a disadvantage or targeted because of their race. It’s like the Racism Olympics. And it’s patently untrue” (Blay, 2015).

**REVERSE RACISM IS A MYTH**

While assumptions and stereotypes about white people do exist, this is considered racial prejudice, not racism. [Racial prejudice](https://www.aclrc.com/glossary) refers to a set of discriminatory or derogatory attitudes based on assumptions derived from perceptions about race and/or skin colour. Thus, racial prejudice can indeed be directed at white people (e.g., “White people can’t dance”) but is not considered [racism](https://www.aclrc.com/racism) because of the systemic relationship to [power](https://www.aclrc.com/racism). When backed with power, prejudice results in acts of discrimination and oppression against groups or individuals. In Canada, white people hold this cultural power due to Eurocentric modes of thinking, rooted in colonialism, that continue to reproduce and privilege [whiteness](https://www.aclrc.com/whiteness). It is whiteness that has the power to define the terms of racialized others’ existence. Tim Wise explains how, for white individuals,

“When a group of people [such as racialized individuals] has little or no power over you institutionally, they don’t get to define the terms of your existence, they can’t limit your opportunities, and you needn’t worry much about the use of a slur to describe you and yours, since, in all likelihood, the slur is as far as it’s going to go. What are they going to do next: deny you a bank loan? Yeah, right. … White perceptions are what end up counting in a white-dominated society. If whites say [Indigenous people] are savages (be they of the “noble” or vicious type), then by God, they’ll be seen as savages. If [Indigenous people] say whites are mayonnaise-eating Amway salespeople, who the hell is going to care? If anything, whites will simply turn it into a marketing opportunity. When you have the power, you can afford to be self-deprecating, after all” (2002).

Ricky Sherover-Marcuse asserts that "we should not confuse the occasional mistreatment experienced by whites at the hands of people of color with the systematic and institutionalized mistreatment experienced by people of color at the hands of whites” (p. 2). While expressions of racial prejudice directed at white people may hurt the white person/people individually or personally, and are never to be condoned, they do not have the power or authority to affect the white person's social/economic/political location and privileges.

“Racism has nothing to do with feelings. It is a measurable reality that white people are not subject to, regardless of their income or status” (Harriot, 2018).

Reverse racism is a myth because it attempts to ignore the power/privilege dynamic between the individuals/groups involved; the myth of reverse racism assumes that racism occurs on a so-called level playing field, when in actuality, it does not. One claim of “reverse racism” that is often made is in relation to affirmative actions programs: programs that were created to help ensure that non-white individuals are given equal consideration and opportunities, whether it is in regards to employment, school, or scholarships etc. For white individuals, programs such as this might feel like something is being “taken away.” Zeba Blay outlines how white people often "believe deserving white students are discriminated against while academically unqualified students are given highly coveted college or company positions ― just because they happen to tick the ‘ethnic minority’ box. This argument ignores the fact that affirmative action did not come out of nowhere ― there was a need for a system that would address the decades of underrepresentation of people of color both academically and in the job world.” Sherover-Marcuse explains how "[a]ffirmative action programs are attempts to repair the results of institutionalized racism by setting guidelines and establishing procedures for finding qualified applicants from all segments of the population” (p. 2). In other words, these programs do not privilege people of colour but are an attempt to “level” the not-so-level playing field that has historically privileged a certain type of candidate.

↳ See our definition of [White Privilege/White-Skin Privilege](https://www.aclrc.com/glossary)